

*Come Holy Spirit, come like the wind and cleanse; take these words and give them your life. Amen.*

Anyone here ever squabble on a car trip? Or had children who did?  
That's what today's gospel reminds me of – travel can cause tension,  
and Jesus' disciples were not immune.

They were anxious anyway, with all his talk about being arrested and tried  
and executed – so they argued. A stupid argument about who was greatest –  
who was Jesus' best friend, who was the leader of the pack.

Conflict is a fact of human nature. Our reading from James breaks it down clearly:

*You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder.*

*And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and  
conflicts.* That pretty much describes our country and our world right now.

*You do not have, because you do not ask.*

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly.*

If our asking is gimme, gimme and not, "I trust you, Lord," we'll be frustrated.

What if I said I could teach you this morning to avoid conflict? It's not hard...

We'll be able to remake the world so that everyone can live without conflict.

It's not hard: "Put God first in your life. Love God totally. Treat others as you  
want them to treat you." There. We're done. It's easy, right?

Yeah, if it were easy, everyone would be doing it.

Conflict comes from fear, fear for ourselves and for those we consider "in."

That's why the disciples were arguing – they worried the whole thing was  
unraveling, that they'd lose Jesus and maybe their own lives.

That's why the early Christians James is writing to were in conflict – they were  
threatened. That is usually the source of all hatefulness, all conflictedness. Fear.

Conflict is a fact of life. There would be no drama without conflict, no stories.

That doesn't mean we are to indulge it – as is true of some home remedies,  
just because it's "natural" doesn't mean it's good for you!

The way of the Kingdom of God, the energy field of God, invites us into a  
super-natural life, a super-natural discipline, powered by the Spirit of God.

We are called to a way of humility that gains power by giving it away,  
that trusts in enough by enjoying all we have,  
that gives our self in love even when we are not loved back.

As I read that again, think of how Jesus lived.

We are called to a way of humility that gains power by giving it away,  
that trusts in enough by enjoying all we have,  
that gives our self in love even when we are not loved back.

When we are able to live that way, we reduce the conflict around us.

Even Jesus' closest followers weren't able to live that way, though.

He knew what they were arguing about. He knew they were acting childish.

He tells them this God Life is not about power and status – it's about service.

That those who want to be first, must be the servant of all.

Then he gives them a visual parable to show them how to live child-like.

He takes a child and puts him – or her – in the middle of them, and puts his arms around that child. "Get it?" he's saying. This is who you are to be."

Jesus was not placing in their midst a symbol of cuteness and innocence,  
which is how we often think of children.

He was placing in their midst a symbol of the lowliest of the low,

a human being with little value and no rights, someone who was in fact "last."

Children in Jesus' day did not have the status they have in our day and culture.

I'm sure parents loved their children – we have stories of parents anxious for Jesus to heal their children; but children were valued for the work they would one day perform – they may have been ahead of slaves in value, but not by much.

So Jesus places in the midst of them a symbol of worthlessness, of "last-ness."

And then he takes that child and puts his arms around her, or him,

a gesture of love and acceptance and treasuring, of giving great value.

"Okay, you see this?" he says. "Whoever accepts one worthless one like this, accepts me. And whoever accepts me, accepts the One who sent me, God himself."

In many parts of the world even today, children do not have the status

they have in the U.S. For much of human history, and in much of the world now, children have had no status. They are assets to be capitalized.

In some homes, they are loved and nurtured and educated. In others,

they are exploited for the work they can do or the money they can beg.

They are often enslaved and even today are traded –  
to be soldiers, to be factory workers, to be trafficked in the global sex trade.  
On our own borders we have countless children in custody,  
still not reunited with their parents, while the cost of maintaining them  
in sub-standard conditions rises into billions of dollars.  
In our own county hundreds of children in our public schools are homeless,  
and as we have no affordable housing in the County and evictions increase,  
those numbers are likely to rise.

*“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,  
and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”*  
We’re good at taking care of our children – now how do we open our hearts  
to see all children as our children, grandchildren?  
It’s in our self-interest to guarantee security and enough for everyone,  
yet Jesus invites us to learn the value the interests of others.  
It’s human to privilege your own kin and community – yet Jesus redefined family  
and community; he asks us to see all children as our children, grandchildren.  
He invites us from childish to child-like, to welcome the weak and vulnerable  
in his name, and to be willing to become weak and vulnerable in his name.

If we are serious about welcoming Jesus into our lives, into our church,  
we need to be serious about welcoming children. And welcome, hospitality,  
means being invested in their growth as spiritual beings.  
If we want the children who are part of Christ Church to grow into the full stature  
of Christ, as we affirmed when they were baptized, we need to feed them  
spiritually. That means offering Sunday School, and that means adults  
willing to spend time with them during part of the church service.  
There haven’t been many willing to do that, folks – can we put aside our  
own needs for one Sunday a month to nurture the faith of our children?

And it doesn’t stop with our own children – what about the spiritual growth  
of those children who have no homes or over-stressed families?  
How might we invest in them? Many homeless families live in long-stay motels –  
what if we were to offer Sunday school one afternoon a week to those families?  
What if we were to offer to pick them up to join us for church,  
to bring their gifts and passions as well as their needs into this family?  
Yes, there are Covid realities, but let’s be creative.

It's not only that we need to teach and nurture our children –  
we need to learn from them. Because they've got it –  
this faith thing, this wonder thing, until we school it out of them.  
They can teach us again how to be child-like, how to cultivate the  
wonder and trust and spirit of exploration children exemplify.  
As we become less childish and more child-like, we make God visible. Imagine!

Are you ready to welcome God into your heart,  
to make more space for Jesus in your life?  
As we truly let Jesus in to our lives and start asking him to show us who  
he is calling us to welcome in his name, the children will come.  
Our God-children will come.

**Mark 9:30-37**

Jesus and his disciples went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

**But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.**

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" **But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.** He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "**Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.**"

**James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a**

**W**ho is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? **You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.** You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.**

What makes sense for us as followers of Christ is that we learn to live long-term. Those who live in the hope of resurrection life learn to become long-term thinkers.